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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN CHANCELLERY'S VIEWS ON HAMAS: STICK TO QUARTET LINE

Classified By: DCM SCOTT KILNER, FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

¶1. (C) Congressman Robert Wexler (D-Florida) and Professional Staff Member Jonathan Katz, joined by DCM and PolOff, met with Chancellor Schuessel's senior foreign policy adviser, Hans Peter Manz, on February 22. Manz spoke at length on the approach that Austria's EU Presidency is taking toward Hamas. EU-U.S. solidarity on Hamas is critical, Manz said, stressing that the EU and the Austrian Presidency want to stick to the Quartet line and are in no way interested in a split with the United States. Manz (whose views almost certainly reflect those of Schuessel) added that the EU cannot and will not step back from the three conditions the Quartet established.

¶2. (C) Manz cited Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel as a solid force for future transatlantic unity on Hamas. Simply put, "Germany won't allow" a softer EU position on Hamas, he said. The recent controversy over the Danish cartoons only makes it more probable that the EU will not stray from the Quartet policy, Manz predicted. Manz said European publics will not accept any "appeasement" of militant Islam after recent incidents vilifying Europe in the Muslim world -- although individual politicians might want to try.

¶3. (C) Manz's biggest concern was that Hamas at some point might begin to "pay lip service" to the Quartet conditions while not substantively changing its policies. He made an analogy to Sinn Fein and the IRA, suggesting that Hamas could develop a quasi-respectable political wing nominally separated from a more militant armed unit.

¶4. (C) Manz summed up his formula for medium-term policy as: "Watch Hamas, wait for the Israeli election, and work with the resulting new Israeli government." The best strategy, he thought, was first to work through Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who also has the mandate of the Palestinian people. Manz opined that the international community will not definitively have to decide how to approach Hamas until after the Israeli election. Hamas does not know where it stands right now and will need time to organize after its surprising victory, he said. After the formation of the next Israeli government, Austria and the EU will have to coordinate their policy with Israel. Manz predicted that Hamas will eventually pay a high price domestically for raising public expectations that it will not be able to meet.

¶5. (C) One important parameter is how to continue humanitarian aid, Manz said. If that is lacking from Europe and the U.S., Hamas could turn to "other sources," although Manz thought that it was unclear whether those sources could sustain a sufficient level of aid for an extended period.

Congressman Wexler did not have an opportunity to clear this
message before departure.

McCaw